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Lenin: Personal Impressions.

(By S. P. Bunting.)

I only saw or heard Lenin once, and that was at the Fourth Congress of the Communist International at Moscow in November, 1922. Before that indeed I had been quite elated on hearing that a paper I had written on "Colonial Questions" for the "Nouvel Orient" magazine had been read by Lenin who would probably ask me to come and have a talk with him on the subject; but owing no doubt to the greater claim of other matters on his limited time and strength (for he was then also in a poor way) the interview, of course to my great disappointment, never came off. But he kept his appointment to address the Congress (although even then he spoke with difficulty and retired immediately he had finished without waiting for the debate), and I wormed my way up as close as I could, both in order to have a good look at him and to follow as best I could his speech, which was in German—and even he had an interpreter by him to assist when he got stuck for a word.

One notices at once that no photographs truly represent him. Some of them of course are deliberate caricatures, intended to suggest the black-haired plotter of devilish atrocities and terrorism, with horns almost visibly growing from his head. But even the others fail to produce the true impression. Not that the shape or features of his light complexioned face are in themselves especially admirable; but no picture can reproduce their extreme mobility and vivacity, the rapid, twinkling eyes glancing here and there as if to miss nothing, the live, humorous, sometimes quizzical turns of his expression, and with all the look of great confidence and sagacity.

Whatever he might have been in his prime, he was no orator on that occasion. Rather he seemed on the side of those who consider rhetoric the meretricious side of propaganda. The chief impression he gave was that every word he said was true, correct, sound, neither exaggerated nor understated, not designed to excite either undue elation or groundless fear, but something you could bank on and, recognising its fulfilment in after years, say "Did he not say so at the Fourth Congress?" Not that he was a mere lecturer. Woe to him on whom Lenin's big guns were turned, we were told by those who had been worsted or rather silenced by him in debate in previous years. When he had spoken, the last word had been said. His faith was great because it was based on, and coincided with, his almost unerring judgment. The ignorant bourgeoisie regard Social revolutions as the product of some evil plot, of the "black art" of some "sinister" "agitator," and the mean and frivolous obituary notices of Lenin in the capitalist press still reflect this superstitiousness. But the class-conscious workers of the world know already, and the rest will not be long now in finding out, both how profound is their loss, and the loss to the world, with the passing of that leader last Monday, and at the same time how completely he himself was the product as well as the producer of a revolution which is scientifically inevitable, which demands and will produce again the same qualities of judgment, daring, hard work and self-sacrifice not only on the part of a rare leader but of thousands and millions of the rank and file toilers of all lands, races and colours, until victory is won.

More than most, then, Lenin is immortal: he continues to lead the working class to victory after his death. It used to be predicted that he and his colleagues would corrupt the revolution into a Napoleonic tyranny; but that was the prediction of people who did not understand the difference between bourgeoisie and workers—exploiters and exploited. With the workers' final victory class domination (of which personal tyranny is only an instrument) comes to an end, and individual leaders can gradually be spared just as in the end the State itself will fall away in favour of the Workers' Commonwealth.

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